

REMARKS

Entry of the proposed amendments pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.116 is believed to be appropriate in view of the fact that no new issues are presented and further detailed consideration will not be required, as explained in detail below.

The amendment to the written description filed August 21, 2002 has been withdrawn in view of the fact that the Examiner considers the "part cut" to include any type of cut, not only the chamfered/angled cut shown in the drawings.

Allowed claim 1 was amended to change the term "bevel" to "cut-away portion" to restore the generic aspect of the "part cut" from the panel edge.

Allowed claim 1 also was amended to remove what is considered to be an unnecessary limitation, namely the phrase "wherein these coupling elements are configured so that the panels can be rotated into or out of one another at least along said opposite edges".

In view of the reasons why the Examiner believed that claim 1 was allowable (covering layer comprising a separate layer from the panel decorative layer) it is respectfully submitted that removal of this limitation from claim 1 will not affect the patentability of the claim or require any detailed consideration whatsoever.

Allowed claim 1 also was amended to remove another unnecessary limitation, namely that both edges of the panel included a cut-away portion. Claim 1 was amended to only require that at least one of the two opposite edges includes the cut-away portion. Again, in view of the reasons for allowability of this claim, removal of this unnecessary limitation will not require any detailed consideration and does not affect the grounds for allowance of the claim.

On this last point, support for the language of containing the cut-away portion on at least one of the opposite edges is found in original claim 10, line 3. Accordingly, the original application contained full support for the amendment language.

Other housekeeping type amendments are also proposed for claim 1, as will be evident from the LIST OF CURRENT CLAIMS.

For the foregoing reasons, it is respectfully submitted that the grounds for allowance of claim 1 have not been substantively changed and the claim remains fully

allowable over the prior art of record.

The remaining allowed claims 3, 4, 6, 7, 10-12, 14-16, 20 and 21 have been amended as needed to make them consistent with allowed claim 1 as presently amended, and to clean up minor inconsistencies.

Rejected claims 8 and 9 are canceled and claim 17 has been amended to avoid the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 112, and to improve the clarity of the claim.

Rejected claim 18 now has been amended so that it is in dependent form, depending from allowable claim 1.

Further, with regard to claim 17, the Examiner expresses a lack of understanding as to what this claim was intended to express. The Examiner's attention is invited to Figure 10 of the drawings, and in particular the plane represented by line W. It will be noted that the plane W includes the bevel 26 and the plane W of the bevel does not intersect any other portion of the edge of the panel, in particular the projecting locking lip 10 at the bottom of the panel. This geometry permits machinery to process the bevel 26 without interfering with any other edge area of the panel, as shown in Figure 10.

Claim 17 has been amended in an effort to improve the description of the inventive subject matter and it is respectfully submitted that the claim as-amended avoids any lack of understandability.

Claim 22 has been canceled.

Claims 23-32 are dependent directly or indirectly from allowable claim 1 or claim 10. Accordingly, these new claims do not present any new issues requiring detailed consideration or further search.

Every effort has been made to place the application in condition for allowance and it is respectfully submitted that this application is in condition to be passed to issue.

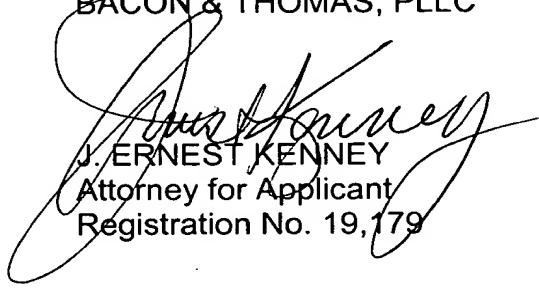
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If any issues remain that can be resolved through a telephone conference with applicant's attorney, the Examiner is invited to telephone applicant's attorney at the number shown below.

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Respectfully submitted,

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Date: June 12, 2003

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